

**7 June 2020**

**Trinity Sunday**

*John 3:16-18*

Our disc golf course that I like to call All Saints, sort of like St. Andrew's, because it was officially opened on November 1, 2016, needed a little maintenance. So, I bought some wood chips to refresh the bases under the hole targets. Near hole number seven, some of the neighborhood youth and I were hanging out and chilling with a hammock attached to two of our white pines. As I was spreading the wood chips, **I overheard one of the three or four, a male let's call him Zack, giving his opinions about a few things.** This I heard clearly: "You know, when you see someone who looks kind of sad, you should definitely not ask them how they're doing because then, they'll reflect for a few seconds and start crying." His companions didn't respond right away, so I jumped in. **"Well," I said, "if you don't ask them, they'll probably think you don't care."** Then one of his female pals said, "Yeah, Zack, some social worker you'd be."

**Today's Gospel passage, if it's trying to say one thing, it's that we do NOT have a God who doesn't care.** God sent his Son into the world on a rescue mission, not to condemn but to save. To save us from our fears, from our sense of separation, from our guilt...God so loved the world and God came to be with us. God took flesh in our world as Light in the midst of Darkness, to show us the Way the Truth and the Life as the Way of Love. **As nonviolent Love, God encountered violent sinful humanity and was nailed to a cross and died. As evidence, however, that might does not make right and that Love is the most powerful force in the universe, God raised Jesus from death to life.** And for we who accept this belief, we are given power to live as children of God; we are saved.

God so loved the world. Many of us at St. James and beyond are in the midst of an online retreat, on YouTube, led by Jesuit priest, Fr. **Mark Thibodeaux.** **It is excellent. In his first talk, he wanted to communicate the way God loves us** and he told a story from his own life.

He said that **during his days in rural Louisiana directing Jesuit novices, he would jog almost daily.** And two constants on these outings were his encounters with Sammy and Smokey, two dogs who anticipated his approach and reveled in his affectionate petting. **Sammy was an old dog,** and when Mark approached he would start leaning to his right where Mark's leg would soon be, and then lean it against Mark while he petting his neck and behind his ears. A few miles farther along, he would come across Smokey, a young more energetic dog, waiting eagerly. When Mark was next to him, he would wriggle around on his back with all four legs up and his private parts for all to see, and **Mark rewarded his vulnerability by rubbing his chest and belly.** This went on for years in that temperate climate.

One morning in prayer, Mark was trying to listen to the voice of God, and was rewarded with a clear message in his heart. God said, **"You know how you love Sammy and Smokey? When you are going to let me love you like that?"** And the Light went on! God so loved the world...He came not to condemn but to save. Can you imagine God loving you like that? It would be a grace and it would be based on what the Bible tells us is true about God who is love. Father, Son and Holy Spirit, a Trinity of Love. The Father loving the Son, the Son Loving the Father, and the Love flowing between them as Spirit, St. Augustine posited.

**How does this relate to our times** with our culture going through what I hope are growing pains as we move toward a more just society and an end **to racism? It might seem a little trite.** Is a tickling God the

God we need right now? Tickling or not, I think a tender and loving God is exactly what we need right now. Does God have fun with us when his children are either hurting his other children or being hurt by them? Of course not. God grieves where sin is so active, and tries to activate his Holy Spirit in us to pursue the way of Love, and fairness and peace.

**But we need the tender, playful, love of God more than ever now**, because I'll wager that is **precisely what is lacking in the hearts of those causing so much harm in our world**. When you don't know that at the ground of your very being you are loved, that you are worth the life and death of God in Jesus, you'll scramble to find other ways to make yourself feel strong and important—often by making yourself feel stronger and better than others.

And so we pray: Loving God, you so loved the world that over 2000 years ago you sent your only Son to show us the way of love. We need your Holy Spirit now to show us the way. Touch our hearts when we hate, that we might know your tenderness. Touch our hearts when we fear that we might be strong in your love that is eternal and victorious, and to continue to touch the hearts of all of your people to increase our desire to live as you do, O God, a community of Love. If You, Trinity God, can live in community and harmony, human beings can also do likewise. Save us again and again, O Loving God.